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AUTHOR Rutenbeck, Jeffrey B.
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ABSTRACT

A study examined the conserving tendencies of the established political party press during the early stages of the antislavery movement. Eighteen partisan newspapers--from both northern and southern states--were examined for their coverage of the July 30, 1836, mob violence against James G. Birney and his Cincinnati "Philanthropist," and the November 7, 1837, shooting death of Elijah P. Lovejoy. It was hypothesized that newspapers most closely affiliated with those in political power, to preserve the status quo, would condemn the dissident press and deny the dissident editor's right to speak freely. For analysis, coverage was divided into three categories: (1) papers expressing original editorial views, (2) papers reprinting editorial views from other papers; and (3) papers with no coverage at all. The results indicated that all newspapers in the first category, with the exception of the New York "Evening Post," blamed the abolitionist editors for the violence, and the majority of newspapers in the second category reprinted material blaming the editors. The results also indicated that in both categories 1 and 2, the papers with the most demonstrable ties to established parties ignored freedom of the press issues and fervently blamed and opposed the abolitionist editors. (Sixty-two notes are included.) (Author/HTH)

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Partisan Press Coverage of Anti-Abolitionist Violence - A Case Study of Status Quo Journalism

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Jeffrey B. Rutenbeck

School of Communications
University of Washington
Seattle, WA 98195

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ABSTRACT

PARTISAN PRESS COVERAGE OF ANTI-ABOLITIONIST VIOLENCE - A CASE STUDY OF STATUS QUO JOURNALISM

by Jeffrey B. Rutenbeck
University of Washington

Eighteen partisan newspapers were examined for their coverage of the July 30,1836, mob violence against James G. Birney and his Cincinnati Philanthropist, and the November 7,1837, shooting death of Elijah P. Lovejoy. The newspapers examined: Albany Argus, Washington, D.C., National Intelligencer, Boston Post, Springfield, Mass., Weekly Republican, Missouri Republican, Nashville Republican, Richmond Enquirer, Charleston Mercury, New York Evening Post, Washington Globe, Eastern Argus, Franfort Argus, Independent Chronicle and Boston Patriot, Georgia Messenger, Kentucky Gazette, Maryland Gazette, Louisville Journal.

The hypothesis studied is that newspapers most closely affiliated with those in power, in the interest of preserving the status quo, will condemn the dissident press and deny the dissident editor's right to speak freely. The paper divides coverage into three categories: 1) papers expressing original editorial views; 2) papers reprinting editorial views from other papers; 3) papers with no coverage whatsoever. All newspapers in category 1, with the exception of William Cullen Bryant's Evening Post, blamed the abolitionist editors for the violence, and the majority of newspapers in category 2 reprinted material blaming the editors. The research shows that in both categories one and two, the papers with the most demonstrable ties to established parties ignored freedom of the press issues and fervently blamed and opposed the abolitionist editors.

PARTISAN PRESS COVERAGE OF ANTI-ABOLITIONIST VIOLENCE - A CASE STUDY OF STATUS QUO JOURNALISM

There are no doubt many roles of the press in American society; it would be simplistic to claim that the press, at any given time, has served any singular purpose in the United states. In libertarian theory, the press is valued as the guardian of discussion and rational decision-making, it is revered as the light that guides the self-governed through treacherous, ever changing times. The press is said to act as a "watchdog" against government wrongdoings, as a watcher to protect society from danger and as an information source that keeps its audience up to date about world events.[1] These functions, however, do not represent a complete picture of the relationship between press and society.

One of the earliest articulations of a different view - a critical view - came from Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton in their seminal article "Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action." The authors encapsulate the burgeoning critical approach to the study of mass media:

> Since the mass media are supported by great business concerns geared into the current social and economic system, the media contribute to the maintenance of that system. This contribution is not found merely in the effective advertisement of the sponsor's product. It arises, rather, from the typical presence in magazine stories, radio programs and newspaper columns of some element of confirmation, some element of approval of the present structure of society. And this continuing reaffirmation underscores the duty to accept.
>
> To the extent that the media of mass communication

> have had an influence upon their audiences, it has stemmed not only from what is said, but more significantly from what is not said. For these media not only continue to affirm the status quo, but, in the same measure, they fail to raise essential questions about the structure of society. Hence by leading toward conformism and by providing little basis for a critical appraisal of society, the commercially sponsored mass media indirectly but effectively restrain the cogent development of a genuinely critical outlook. (2)

Though this notion of the media as social legitimators was so eloquently articulated almost 40 years ago, the critical approach to media studies has received serious attention only in the last 15 years. Not until the work of Gaye Tuchman, Todd Gitlin, Jeremy Tunstall, Herbert Altschull, David Chaney, Peter Dahlgren, and others, has the role of the press as social legitimator been examined extensively. In this respect, the fundamental departure from the old research tradition rests with the perspective of viewing the press primarily as a conservator of society as opposed to seeing it as an agent of social change. [3]

Most of the work of critical researchers has centered around sociological and political investigations into the production and effects of contemporary mass media, thus, historical investigations into the conserving nature of the press are few. Daniel Schiller's Objectivity and the News, and Michael Schudson's Discovering the News are two of the most notable.

This study is an attempt to examine the conserving tendencies of the established party press during the early stages of the antislavery movement. The antislavery movement of the early nineteenth century serves as a dramatic illustration of the clash between dissident groups

(abolitionists) and defenders of the status quo (political press), and so it provides an opportunity for the study of the press in times of social change. Of the institutional turbulence of the antebellum America, slavery scholar John L. Thomas calls abolitionism a "holy war" against slavery, in which "three turbulent decades witnessed a continuing moral assault on Southern institutions and hard-fought encounters with Northern resistance, sharp skirmishes with mob rule, major engagements against both political parties, and, finally, an insurrection within the abolitionist camp itself. From beginning to end abolitionism was a militant movement."[4]

This paper represents a case study in how the partisan press dealt with two particular events of this "militant movement" - the antiabolitionist mob violence against James G. Birney in 1836 and the mob killing of Elijah P. Lovejoy in 1837. The hypothesis being tested is the notion that newspapers most closely affiliated with those in power, in the interest of preserving the status quo, will condemn the trouble-making nature of the dissident press, try to discredit their cause and the people behind the cause, and outwardly deny the dissident's right to speak freely.

The two areas of historical scholarship of concern to this study are works on abolition and those on the political press. Research in these two areas has, for the most part, run a parallel course, and little has been done to relate the two. This paper is an attempt to examine the intersection between abolition and the political press - an intersection that should shed new light on both areas, especially in terms of the receptivity of the established order to a large-scale reform movement.

A review of the literature devoted to the study of abolitionism reveals a lode of stimulating scholarship. The most notable general works, such as

Louis Filler's Crusade Against Slavery, 1830-1860 (New York: Harper and Bros., 1960) John L. Thomas' Slavery Attacked: The Abolitionist Crusade (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965) and Martin Duberman's The AntiSlavery Vanguard: New Essays on the Abolitionists (Princeton University Press, 1965) provide a strong foundation for understanding the abolition period itself. Aileen Kraditor's Means and Ends in American Abolitionism (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967) outlines the debates within the abolitionist movement, illustrating that it was anything but a unified crusade. And Russell Nye's Fettered Freedom: Civil Liberties and the Slavery Controversy, 1830-1860 (Chicago: University of Illinions Press, 1963) presents the compelling argument that abolitionism blossomed in the 1830s because of the perceived threat to civil liberties posed by antiabolitionist mob violence. Howard A. Morrison's "Gentlemen of Proper Understanding: A Closer Look at Utica's Anti-Abolitionist Mob" New York History 62 (Jan.):61-82 and the work it is based on, Leonard L. Richard's "Gentlemen of Property and Standing:" Anti-abolition Mobs in Jacksonian American (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) both profile who the antiabolitionists were, how they were organized and why they were fighting. However, the actual stance of the party press, which represented the concerns of many of these "gentlemen," has yet to be explored. [5]

This study was conceived also to shed more light on the functions of the party press during the "Dark Ages of Journalism" (so labelled by Frank Luther Mott). The pioneering work of William Ames has done much to discredit Mott's sweeping condemnation of the party press of the early nineteenth century. Ames, Gerald Baldasty and others have succeeded in illustrating the vitality of the press during that era. Of his own work on

the subject, Ames writes "It is an attempt to show that political journalism, rather than being the dark ages of the American newspaper, offered a higher quality information and interpretation of American society than at any other time in American history." [6] However, there are many aspects of the partisan press still to be investigated. This study focuses on the dedication of some factions of the 1830s' political press to the status quo as illustrated by press reaction to antiabolitionist violence against newspapers.

The Events

This study documents reaction of 18 partisan papers to two particular events: the July 30, 1836, antiabolitionist riots against James G. Birney and his Cincinnati Philanthropist in which a sizable mob wrecked Birney's office and press, harrassed his employees and family and then proceeded to demolish several buildings in the black section of town; and the November 7, 1837, shooting death of Alton, Illinois, abolitionist Elijah P. Lovejoy, who was killed trying to protect his press from being destroyed for a fourth time.[7] The two events chosen, especially the death of Elijah Lovejoy, represent a turning point in general opposition to the abolitionist movement. Until these tragedies, no identifiable events had so clearly outlined the potential costs of slave power. As Stanley Elkins writes, "on one level, acts of martyrdom or graded equivalents of martyrdom (the killing of Lovejoy, the manhandling of Garrison, or the wrecking of Birney's press) served to engage a whole series of libertarian values not originally connected with slavery." [8]

Examining party press coverage of these two events, because they

involve violence against abolitionist editors, offers the opportunity to look at not only how dissident leaders were treated by the established press, but more specifically how dissident editors were treated by newspapers closely allied with the existing power structure. Also, because editors and their newspapers were the objects of the violence, it is hoped that this study will provide insight into the status of freedom of the press rationale in the early second quarter of the nineteenth century.

Lazarsfeld's and Merton's ideas concerning the conservative nature of the press were based on contemporary observations of a contemporary mass media system. However, most institutions of communication serve the greater system of which they are a part, whether they are commercially-based or patronage-and subscriber-based, as in the case of the party press. The party press, as an extension and representation of political power in the early 19th century, can be expected to act in accordance with the dominant power interests of the time. The abolitionists, clearly a dissident group in the 1830s, can be expected to be the target of harsh criticism for endangering the stability of the community and the nation itself.

Method

Eighteen newspapers were examined for the month of August 1836, and the month of November 1837. The newspapers were selected from a variety of geographic areas and for varying degrees of political influence. All items in the papers pertaining to the two events were noted.

Three distinct aspects of coverage were considered. First, the study reveals papers that devote outright editorial effort in relation to the two

events. Many of these papers frame their editorial views with accounts of the incidents (letters from witnesses or reprints from other papers). Second, the results show the use of news accounts and borrowed editorial comment. There are many instances where editorial comment and accounts of the violence (letters from witnesses or reprints from other papers) are printed with little or no comment from the publishing paper, thus in many cases apparently adopting wholesale the views of the third party writer. And third, an important aspect to consider is the absence of coverage, whether the reason for its absence be incidental or intentional.

With these three distinctions in mind, the coverage of the papers is presented in three sections: 1) papers offering their own editorial views concerning the violence; 2) papers offering no original editorial comment but using reprints from other papers; 3) papers offering no coverage of either incident.

1) Papers expressing editorial views

The Albany Argus, edited by Edwin Croswell, devoted a great deal of space to both incidents. Croswell was one of the principals in the "Albany Regency," a coalition of influentials headed by Vice President Martin Van Buren (who became president in March 1837), a coalition that "determined broad party strategy, occupied important offices, used their influence to guide the actions of caucuses and conventions, managed the equitable distribution of patronage, enforced reasonably high standards of governmental efficiency and - above all - made a fetish of party unity." [9] Croswell has been labelled a "business-minded moderate." [10] And he has

been credited with transforming the "conservative Democratic" Argus into "the mouthpiece of the state-banking Democrats." [11] Between 1831 and 1841 Croswell and his Argus received an average of $399.36 per year in executive department patronage. [12] Croswell also commanded several lucrative New York state printing contracts, which benefited his business a great deal. [13]

In its August 10 issue the Argus makes some interesting arguments concerning the riots against Birney:

> Abolitionist fanaticism continued to exhibit itself at Cincinnati with the same disregard of the known wishes and feelings of that community and of its business interests, that has characterized the incendiaries wherever they have succeeded in maintaining by sufferance a temporary foothold. Not withstanding, the press of Birney, the editor of the Philanthropist abolitionist newspaper, has been once destroyed by a justly excited populace, yet in defiance of remonstrances of a committee representing 19/20ths of the citizens of Cincinnati, the publication of this pestilent paper is still continued under circumstances calculated to increase, rather than allay the excitement. (14)

The Argus goes on to scoff at the abolitionists' claim to the right of free speech saying "Such are the beauties of Abolitionism here at the north, and such the pretences set up to justify an irritating and merciless warfare against the domestic institutions, the property and the lives of the people of the southern states . . . They [abolitionists] go for the 'right to discuss' - with a vengeance, wherever they have the folly or the boldness to show themselves in their true character and designs." [15] The Argus printed accounts from other papers on August 11, 12 and 15 - all of these reprints contained harsh criticism of the abolitionists.

In contrast to such an outspoken stance on the Birney riots, the Argus afforded very brief coverage of the shooting death of Elijah Lovejoy. In its November 22, 1837, issue the Argus reprinted two letters: one, a straightforward account by the mayor of Cincinnati, and the other, a letter from a "respectable" man who claimed that in the fighting Lovejoy "murdered" a man named Bishop, and so Lovejoy got what he deserved. There was no further comment on the event. [16]

The Washington, D.C., National Intelligencer, owned and edited by Joseph Gales and William Seaton, presents a slightly different perspective on the events. The Intelligencer, which can be characterized as an "independent" paper compared to most of its partisan counterparts, spent much of the 1830s battling Jackson and his policies. After losing its federal patronage contracts in the 1820s, the Intelligencer was able to distance itself from party constraints. [17] For all of its maverick tendencies, however, the Intelligencer still devoted noticeable effort to maintaining the status quo. In his history of the the Intelligencer, Ames writes "During the remainder of the [Jackson] administration the Intelligencer followed the expected path of any Whig journal: opposition to annexing Texas, support of internal improvements, and preservation of the union at all costs." [18] Concerning North-South friction in particular, Gales and Seaton attempted to "bring understanding" between the upper and lower United States. "The program was carried on for at least forty years as the editors argued for a policy of moderation." [19]

Intelligencer coverage of the events consisted of two lengthy but ambiguous editorials. These editorials make no comment on the abolitionist movement in general. However, Gales and Seaton expressed

grave reservations about the mob violence, saying "the remedy should not be worse than the disease." [20] They acknowledge Birney's Philanthropist as a "mischevous paper," yet they clearly favor more moderate measures of dealing with Birney's mischief.

Gales's and Seaton's appeal to lawful action resounds even stronger in their editorial concerning the death of Lovejoy:

> It is with the most poignant regret that we have learnt the outrages of which the subjoined article furnishes details that cannot be read without shuddering. It may be true, as stated in the closing paragraph, that the abettors of the abolitionist press are chiefly responsible for the affray; but no friend to the supremecy of the laws can hold guiltless those who, according to the account before us, excited a mob to assail private property, and even mounted ladders and set fire to a building containing vast amounts of property of unoffending individuals." (21)

Again, the editors of the Intelligencer make little effort to comment on the abolitionists themselves, rather, they imply that Birney and others are offenders who are probably responsible for the "affray." They pay little attention to the murder of an abolitionist, though they do not fail to make an argument for the protection of private property.

The Boston Post and its editor Charles G. Greene demonstrated a more dramatic opposition to abolitionism. A principal Jacksonian paper in largely anti-Jackson Massachusetts, Greene and his paper had a long history of federal patronage. Between 1835 and 1837 the Post received $16,416.92 in federal funding, considerably more than most other papers under the executive wing. [22]

The Post devoted little space to comment on the riots against Birney. On August 12, 1836, Greene printed a one-inch blurb: "An AntiAbolitionist

mob in Cincinnati has destroyed the printing office where the Philanthropist, an abolitionist paper, was printed and several houses of ill fame. These riots are most disgraceful to our country."

Post issues of November 20 and 21 contain bare bones descriptions of the killing of Lovejoy with no comment whatsoever. Nearly a week earlier, however, the Post clearly outlined its position on abolitionism:

> We regret much to see the democracy of Massachesetts courting the support of the abolitionists. If they should succeed, at the present election, in getting their votes, they are not sure of them the next. They are a sect who have no instinct, no well-defined political principles to guide them, and they may be induced to join the Federal party with the same ease which they can be persuaded to join any other. (23)

The Springfield, Massachusetts Weekly Republican, edited by Samuel Bowles II, father of Samuel Bowles III, appears weak in its adherence to party. In fact, according to Bowles III's biographer the paper lacked personality in general: "But, between 1826 and 1844, the pages of the Weekly Republican throw little light upon the social life of the times. It has two chief staples - political discussions, and scraps of miscellaneous unassorted news. The politics are more vigorous than lucid. Personal party names do service largely in place of rational discussion." [24]

The Weekly Republican neglected to print anything about the riots against Birney. On the killing of Lovejoy, however, the paper makes an unqualified condemnation of the mob violence. In referring to the recent mob violence in Baltimore, the Convent riot at Charleston and the tragedies at Vicksburg, the Weekly Republican reads "it [Lovejoy's death] must be set down among those disgraceful outrages which admit of no excuse or

pallation, and in which individual fanatacism or misconduct afford no apology for popular violence." [25]

The papers that were least critical of the anti-abolitionist violence were the southern papers. The editorial comments in the Missouri Republican, a Whig paper published by Joseph Charless, epitomize the status quo opposition to the abolitionists. In the August 9, 1836, edition, the Republican reprinted from the Cincinnati Whig an account of the Birney riots. The 14-line introduction to the account blamed the abolitionists for "causing" the violence by defying public will. [26] The true colors of the Republican shone crystal clear in their comments about the death of Lovejoy. The November 10 issue reads:

> Everyone must regret this unfortunate occurence but the guilt of the transaction will everrest with those who madly and obstinately persisted in the attempt to establish an abolitionists press there. They were warned time after time of the consequences, and urged by every consideration, not to press the attempt; but to all they turned a deaf ear and public opinion will hold them responsible for the fatal consequences.

The Nashville Republican, a Jacksonian pro-slavery paper with a long history of patronage from the Jackson administration,[27] followed much the same line as its Missouri counterpart. About the Birney riots, the paper reads "We honor the motives of that portion of the citizens who showed such a laudable desire to suppress the frantic rage of abolition, and are grieved that such praiseworthy motives should have been so ill controlled."[28]

The Richmond Enquirer, edited by Thomas Ritchie, provides yet another example of applause for the mob violence against the abolitionist editors. The Enquirer was the most widely-circulated Democratic paper in Virginia.

"Through its columns Ritchie and the Richmond junto guided Virginia Democrats," and he was funded by the lucrative job of state printer from 1814-1835 ($4,800/year). [29]

Of the July 30 violence in Cincinnati, the Enquirer reads "If ever a mob could be justified, it is in the case of the Fanatics of Cincinnati - If ever a mob of this description conducted themselves with any moderation, it was the Mob of Cincinnati." [30] The Alton tragedy prompted an even more demonstrative tone from Ritchie:

> The infatuated Editor of Alton has at length fallen a victim to his obstinancy in the cause of the Abolitionists. Disregarding the known and expressed sentiments of a large portion of the citizens of Alton, in relation to his incendiary publications, and as it would seem, bent upon his own destruction, he formed the determination to establish another press for the propagation of the odious and disorganizing principles of Tappan and his Eastern confederates. (31)

The Charleston Mercury (South Carolina), edited by John Stewart, contained no items on the Cincinnati riots. Yet concerning the death of Lovejoy, the Mercury reprinted verbatim the editorial quoted above from the Richmond Enquirer with no acknowledgement concerning authorship. The tone is not surprising given Stewart's stand on slavery: "In discussions on slavery Stewart pressed for reforms of the institution so that virtually every white could afford at least one slave." [32]

The pages of William Cullen Bryant's New York Evening Post offer a unique perspective on the events. In his history of the Evening Post, Allan Nevins frames the abolitionist issue in 1834: "Few New Yorkers then regarded Southern slavery as a national shame, and almost none had any patience with abolition. Most of the press denounced the movement

emphatically; the Evening Post refused to do this, though it called it wild and visionary." [33] Nevins adds that "before 1840 Bryant had enrolled himself among those who held that the spread of slavery must be stopped."[34] There exists some ambiguity about Bryant's actual manner concerning abolition. Though Arthur Schlesinger characterizes Bryant as one of the "radicals of the day," [35] Louis Filler claims Bryant "took no pleasure in slavery but would take no principled stand against it."[36]

Regardless of any uncertainty concerning Bryant's principles, his radical tendencies seem to have inspired his poet's pen and prompted him to write many eloquent editorials that not only condemned the violence, but also harshly criticized the papers that took no stand against or even approved of the anti-abolitionist violence.

Printing an account from the Cincinnati Whig of the riot against Birney, Bryant takes aim on the Whig for printing justifications for the violence, and he compares the atrocity of the mob to a hypothetical anti-Van Buren mob bent on violently silencing the Evening Post. [37] Questioning how the other papers in New York would react to such an incident, Bryant lashes out at the justifications for violence against Birney printed in the Whig: "Would any single print in this city venture to disgrace itself by speaking of such an outrage in the terms used by the Cincinatti Whig?" [38]

The killing of Elijah Lovejoy obviously shocked and frustrated Bryant. Not only were people killed and private property destroyed, but again many journals took no stand against the atrocity.

> The right to discuss freely and openly, by speech, by the pen, by the press, all political questions, and to examine and animadvert upon all political instititutions, is a right so clear and certain, so interwoven with our other liberties, so

> necessary, in fact, to their existence, that without it we must fall at once into despotism or anarchy. To say that he who holds unpopular opinions must hold them at the peril of his life, and that, if he expresses them in public, he has only himself to blame if they who disagree with him should rise and pat him to death, is to strike at all rights, all liberties, all protection of law, and to justify or extenuate all crimes.
>
> We regard not this as a question connected with the abolition of slavery in the South, but as a question vital to the liberties of the entire Union. . . We are astonished that even a single journal can be found, so forgetful of its own rights, to say nothing of its duties to the community, as to countenance, even indirectly, the idea of muzzling the press by the fear of violence. (39)

It is here that Bryant expands the discussion to the broader picture, and it is with these types of arguments that Birney and Lovejoy became rallying symbols - not simply for freedom of the blacks, but for civil liberties of the whites.[40]

Three days later Bryant again blasts those papers who either explicitly or implicitly condoned the violence:

> We are pained to see any journal of any party extenuating the guilt of this murder. The National Intelligencer, while it cannot hold the rioters guiltless, remarks that 'it may be true that the abettors of the abolition press are *chiefly*[sic] responsible for this affray.' Then is a man who carries money in his pocket 'chiefly responsible' for the act of the robber who takes it? (41)

It is apparent from the exerpts above that Bryant did not follow any particular party or status quo line. What is important to remember, however, is that Bryant operated much as a "radical of the day," and his paper was not held accountable in the same manner of some of those previously discussed.[42]

It must also be noted that a number of papers printed reprobations similar to Bryant's. Russel Nye lists 20 newspapers reprinted by Birney expressing disapproval of the mob and calling attention to the potential threat to the editor's freedom of speech - seven from Ohio, five from Pennsylvania, three from Massachusetts, two from New York, and one each from Iowa and Indiana.[43] Some possible reasons for their compliant views are: a) the papers were distant enough from national party concerns that they perceived the incidents differently from more coalition-oriented papers; b) they felt no immediate threat from the abolitionists; or c) they sympathized with the abolitionists.

Though this study did not include an analysis of all of the papers listed by Nye, further research found that most of these states had extremely active anti-slavery societies and were already thoroughly embroiled in the emancipation dialogue. Ohio was the home of the first abolitionist school, Marietta college founded in 1835. Many other Ohio schools, such as Oberlin, Franklin College in New Athens and Miami University were deeply involved in the abolitionist crusade. Also involved was the Presbyterian Church of Ohio.[44] In 1838 the Ohio School Fund Institution for the education of blacks was founded.[45] As for Pennsylvania, slavery was abolished in 1780, and through the Free African Society, founded in 1787, was established a secular and religious network of societies "through which Northern Negroes could further their physical and spiritual interests."[46] Massachusetts was not only the home of the most famous abolitionist, William Lloyd Garrison (editor of the Boston Liberator), but also the first immediatist anti-slavery society (New England Anti-Slavery Society founded in 1832).[47] The New York Journal of Commerce, listed by Nye along with

Bryant's Evening Post, was established by the Tappan family, and it was run by Arthur Tappan, a one-time president of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. [48]

2)Papers using reprints

Francis Preston Blair's Washington, D.C., Globe was a principal party paper of the era. Blair met regularly with President Jackson. [49] His paper received substantial executive patronage; from 1835 to 1837 the Globe secured $24,626.09 in federal money. In the ten-year period from 1831 to 1841 patronage to the Globe averaged $16,322.28 per year. [50] On the issue of abolitionism, the Globe followed the Jackson line in perceiving abolitionism as nothing more than a concerted plot to destroy democracy.[51]

The Globe allotted little space for coverage of either incident. The August 12, 1836, issue of the Globe contains a two-inch blurb reporting that James G. Birney had directly received money from abolitionist Louis Tappan. The article ends "This is the editor who made his escape from the mob at Cincinnati."

On November 17, 1837, the Globe reprinted a short editorial credited to the Missouri Argus of November 9. The article corresponds, word for word, with the remarks made by the Charleston Mercury (November 22) and the Richmond Enquirer (November 21) - "The infatuated editor of the Alton Observer has at length fallen victim to his own obstinancy . . ." Neither the Mercury or the Enquirer gave credit to anyone else for these particular words. [52]

The Eastern Argus, a Van Buren paper published by I. Berry in Portland,

Maine, included only a condensed three-inch factual account of the riots against Birney, and nothing about the killing of Elijah Lovejoy.

The Frankfort (Kentucky) Argus, formerly edited by Democrat Amos Kendall (who by 1836 was the Postmaster General of the United States), appears to have been too busy printing election results in August of 1836 to include the news about Cincinnati. On November 17, the Frankfort Argus printed a ten-line no-comment account of the affray in Alton.

The Independent Chronicle and Boston Patriot, a Whig paper edited by Nathan Hale, reprinted a letter from Cincinnati that implied that the violence there was Birney's fault (Aug 13). Then, concerning the Lovejoy incident, the Chronicle reprinted an editorial from the November 9 St. Louis Republican which talked of the "curse of abolitionism" and laid the guilt on those "who madly and obstinately persisted in their attempt to establish an abolitionist press there." [53]

The Georgia Messenger (Macon) relied on an account from the Cincinnati Whig for its coverage of the Birney riots. The oft-quoted Cincinnati paper, perhaps more than any other paper, went out of its way to condone the violence against the abolitonist editors. [54] On November 30, 1837, the Messenger printed a two-inch account saying Elijah Lovejoy fired on a crowd and was killed. The brief account ended "Thus, we think, will prevent any further attempt of abolitionists in that quarter." [55]

3)Papers with no coverage

The Kentucky Gazette, edited by George G. Trotter, neglected to include anything about either incident. The Gazette had a history of serving as a

"sheet for liberal forces of the Jeffersonian Republicans and the Democrats." [56]

The Maryland Gazette, considered by many to be the oldest newspaper in the United States, afforded no coverage of the Cincinnati riots and no coverage of the killing of Lovejoy. [57]

The Louisville Journal, a Whig paper edited by staunch partisan G. D. Prentice, was the most extensively read newspaper in Kentucky. [58] There was no coverage in the Journal for the month following each incident. Clement Eaton provides an explanation for such a conspicuous absence. "In mediating upon the situation Prentice arrived at a very striking theory of freedom of the press in a slave state. He announced that he would not engage in the discussion of emancipation until the people themselves called for it." [59]

Conclusions

First, and most generally, it appears that the majority of the partisan papers examined in this study devoted noticeable effort toward maintaining certain aspects of the political, social and economic status quo. For all of the unbridled diatribes, lively dialogue between the established political parties went on within certain established, albeit usually unspoken, boundaries. It appears that for many the call for the immediate abolition of slavery was out of bounds.

Second, this research suggests that, with the exception of William Cullen Bryant and his New York Evening Post, the papers with the most to say against the abolitionist editors had the most demonstrable ties to status quo party machinery (Albany Argus, National Intelligencer, Boston

Post, Hampshire Gazette, Missouri Republican, Nashville Republican, Charleston Mercury, Richmond Enquirer). These papers spoke out against the abolitionist editors, feigning or ignoring discussions of the right to free speech and touting the obligation to follow the "will of the citizens" and silence the abolitionist "fanatics."

This research also provides some insight into the thought processes of the leading political editors of the time. Indeed, it appears that the call for immediate abolition represented a substantial threat not only to those in power in the South, but also to the Northern political machinery centered in Washington, D.C. As Robert Remini says in his biography of Andrew Jackson, "Jackson and other like-minded Democrats saw abolitionism as an evil force dedicated to the dismemberment of the Union and the discrediting of democracy. They labeled it a violation of law, a threat to property rights, and an assault on liberty." [60] It was on these grounds that many of the established partisan papers of the era attacked abolitionism. Graham Murdock, in his article "Political deviance: the press presentation of a militant mass demonstration," points out the overall rationale behind such a stand. Of various movements to reform the status quo, he says:

> In varying degrees, each of these actions presents a radical challenge to both procedures and underlying assumptions of 'consensus politics,' a challenge which those in power must actively contest and overcome, and labelling the actions as illegitimate and 'deviant' is a necessary part of this process. Labelling serves a dual function; first, it reasserts the existence of a basic set of shared assumptions and interests, and secondly, it clarifies the nature of 'consensus by pointing to concrete examples of what is not." (61)

The abolitionists, then, logically became the object of delegitimation because they called for radical social change. It is evident from the

research presented in this paper that even though the violence was directed at newspapers and newspaper editors, in 1836 and 1837 many established partisan papers thought more of the threat to power posed by the abolitionists than of the mob threat to the First Amendment right to speak freely. Concerning Lazarsfeld's and Merton's ideas of legitimation, it appears that many party press papers included in this study staunchly defended the present structure of society, and many of their editorials are significant not only for what is said, but also for what is not said - only William Cullen Bryant was willing to take a genuinely critical stand on the abolition/freedom of the press issue.

Most papers, however, also condemned the mob violence. These condemnations do not necessarily demonstrate any level of respect by those in power for the dissident group. The condemnations of mob violence focused on the "lawlessness" of such violence, not on the right of the abolitionists to speak. These condemnations served to underscore the importance of acceptable, lawful means (i.e., means in accordance with the status quo) - they were obviously not meant to invoke sympathy for the abolitionists.

And finally, at least three possible explanations present themselves concerning the total lack of coverage in several of the papers studied. First, it is possible that news of the incidents did not reach these papers, although this is highly unlikely given the extensive postal exchange system of the time.[62] Second, these papers could have decided that the information was not important enough to be included in such limited space - again, unlikely given the frequency of coverage of the incidents in papers across the country. Third, these papers could have decided to take passive

editorial action by not including coverage of the incidents, thus excluding the topic from discussion in toto, e.g., the Louisville Journal.

There were numerous attempts by the party press to discredit the blossoming dissident movement of the abolitionists in 1836 and 1837. During this period, the majority of the 18 established partisan papers studied explicitly denounced the right of the abolitionists to speak. Even though the violence directly involved newspaper editors, papers with a vested interest in the status quo opted to criticize the abolitionists and their editors rather than defend the rights of free speech - they opted for advocating stability and ignored any sort of fraternal or professional cohesiveness.

It appears that freedom of the press to many of the established partisan papers of the Jacksonian era was perceived as a conditional right afforded to a select few who were subject to legitimation or delegitimation by those in power. Even in the most libertarian of eras, then, it seems that freedom of speech was considered by many to be more of a privilege and less of a constitutional right.

NOTES

1. See Harold Laswell's seminal article "The Structure and Function of Communications in Society," in The Communication of Ideas, ed. Lyman Bryson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948).

2. Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton, "Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action," in The Communication of Ideas, ed Lyman Bryson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948).

3. Elihu Katz, in his prologue to Mass Media and Social Change, points out that the debate between the press-as-reformer and press-as-conserver roles is still being waged. As Karl Erik Rosengren says, the question about media as agents of social change or status quo is a special case of the old question of the relationship between culture and social structure. In most respects there exist three distinct schools of thought on the issue of the relationship between culture and social structure: culture is autonomous; culture creates social structure (idealism); social structure creates culture (materialism). One of the more recent theories that incorporates a different outlook is the "interdependency" theory. This theory stresses the interdependency between culture and social structure and implies that both social and cultural indicators must be taken into account for a full understanding of media effects. See Karl Erik Rosengren, "Mass Media and Social Change, Some Current Approaches," in Mass Media and Social Change, ed. Elihu Katz and Tamas Szecsko (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1981).

4. John L. Thomas, Slavery Attacked: The Abolitionist Crusade (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965) p. 1.

5. For more on the antislavery movement see: Dwight L. Dummond's AntiSlavery Origins of the Civil War in the United States (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1939) examines James G. Birney and the latter phase of the antislavery movement; Marvin Meyer's The Jacksonian Persuasion (Stanford University Press, 1957) addresses the idea that Jacksonianism was essentially moralistic and not economic, thus opening the door for the crusading abolitionists; Stanley Elkins' Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life (University of Chicago Press, 1959) makes the case that slavery could have been abolished without

violence if the abolitionists would have acted to ameliorate the evils of the institutution of slavery rather than attacking it as a problem of pure morality; Gerald Sorin's Abolitionism: A New Perspective (New York: Praeger, 1973) though not as compelling and complete as Filler's landmark work, provides a good bibliographic update. H. L. Perkin's article "The Defense of Slavery in the Northern Press on the eve of the Civil War," Journal of Southern History IX (Feb.-Nov. 1943):501-32 clearly shows that there was no consensus in the North on the slavery issue, even just before the Civil War.

For biographies of James G. Birney see Betty Fladeland's James G. Birney (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1955) and William Birney's James G. Birney and His Times (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1890). For biographies of Lovejoy see Merton Dillon's Elijah P. Lovejoy: Abolitionist Editor (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961) and John Gill's Tide Without Turning: E.P. Lovejoy and the Freedom of the Press (Boston: Starling Press, 1958). Another good biographical source is Janet and William Pease's Bound in them Chains: A Biographical History of the AntiSlavery Movement (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1972).

For histories of slave power see: Henry Wilson's The History of the Rise and Fall of Slave Power in American (Boston: 1872); W.S. Jenkins' ProSlavery Thought in the Old South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935); Gordon E. Finnie's article "The AntiSlavery Movement in the Upper South Before 1840," Journal of Southern History 35 (Aug. 1969):319-42; Eugene Genovese's The Political Economy of Slavery (New York: Vintage, 1965) and The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969); David Donald's article "ProSlavery Argument Reconsidered," Journal of Southern History 37 (Feb. 1971):3-18; and Clement Eaton's Freedom of Thought Struggle in the Old South (Duke University Press, 1940) and his article "Mob Violence in the Old South," Mississippi Valley Historical Review XXXIX (Dec. 1942):351-70.

6. William E. Ames, A History of the National Intelligencer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972) p. ix.

7. Leonard L. Richards, "Gentlemen of Property and Standing" pp. 93-110 provides a good description of both instances.

8. Stanley Elkins, Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) p. 263.

9. Robert P. McCormick, The Second American Party System: Party Formation in the Jacksonian Era (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966) p. 115.

10. Kalman Goldstein, "The Albany Regency: The Failure of Practical Politics," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1969, p. ii.

11. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1945) p. 303.

12. Gerald Baldasty, "Executive Patronage and the Press, 1831-1841," paper presented to AEJMC West Coast Historians Conference, University of San Francisco, February 1984, p. 8.

13. Gerald Baldasty notes "The importance of this patronage should not be underestimated, even when profits were small. In the early 1820s, Thurlow Weed, as a struggling rural editor, found that two or three dollars a week in gross revenues were of great importance in helping his paper and in supporting his family." Journalism Monographs 89 (August 1984), p. 17.

14. The Albany Argus, August 10, 1836.

15. Ibid.

16. The Albany Argus, November 22, 1837.

17. William E. Ames, A History of the National Intelligencer, p. 233.

18. Ibid., p. 243.

19. Ibid., p. 299.

20. The Daily National Intelligencer, August 9, 1836.

21. The Daily National Intelligencer, November 20, 1837.

22. Gerald Baldasty, Executive Patronage and the Press, 1831-1841," p. 9.

23. The Boston Post, November 14, 1837.

24. George S. Merriam, The Life and Times of Samuel Bowles (New York: The Century Company, 1885) vol. II p. 30.

25. The Springfield, Massachusetts Weekly Republican, November 25, 1837.

26. The Missouri Republican, August 9, 1836.

27. Robert K. Stewart, "The Jackson Press and the Elections of 1824 and 1828" master's thesis, University of Washington, 1984, p. 82.

28. The Missouri Republican, August 11, 1836.

29. Lynwood Miller Dent, Jr., "The Virginia Democratic Party, 1824-1847," Ph.D. dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1974, p. 420. Dent says "Whigs correctly denounced Ritchie as a Democrat partisan, though no evidence indicates that his politics affected the performance of his duties." p. 167.

30. The Richmond Enquirer, August 12, 1836.

31. The Richmond Enquirer, November 21, 1837.

32. The Encyclopedia of Southern History (Baton Rouge: Louisana State University Press, 1979) p. 197.

33. Allan Nevins, The Evening Post: A Century of Journalism (New York: Boni and Liveright, Inc., 1922) p. 145.

34. Ibid., p. 172.

35. Schlesinger, The Age of Jackson, p. 32.

36. Louis Filler, The Crusade Against Slavery: 1830-1860 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960) p. 89.

37. Nevins says "This was a time when the right of Abolitionists to continue their agitation was denied from some of the most influential New York pulpits, when the great majority of citizens had no tolerance for them, and when newspapers like Bennett's Herald and Hallock's Journal of

Commerce, both proslavery, gave them nothing but contempt and denunciation. When Elijah P. Lovejoy was murdered at Alton, Illinois, by a mob, there were influential New Yorkers who believed that he had received his deserts, but Bryant cried out in horror." The Evening Post: A Century of Journalism, p. 171.

38. The New York Evening Post, August 10, 1836.

39. The New York Evening Post, November, 18 1837.

40. Russel Nye, Civil Liberties and the Slavery Controversy, 1830-1860 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972) says "The abolitionist crusade was successful, of course, not simply because it managed to merge antislavery with civil liberties. Many other factors - ideological, political, and economic, were involved - yet it is plain from a study of the period that the abolitionist movement became inextricably bound up with the preservation of civil liberties, and that the relationship strengthened it and helped mobilize Northern opinion on its side . . . The net effect was to gain for abolition a body of supporters who thought less of the wrongs of the slave holders than of the rights of the white man - which helps explain the contention of Lincoln and Seward that the Republican party was founded to protect white men, not black." pp. 316-17.

41. The New York Evening Post, November 21, 1837.

42. See William Ames, "Federal Patronage and the Washington, D.C., Press," Journalism Quarterly 49 (Spring 1972): 22-30. Though there is no direct evidence linking printing contracts with editorial complacence, it is reasonable to consider the possibility that because government printing contracts were awarded by legislative vote, papers interested in those contracts would do their best to stay out of trouble with the established parties.

43. Russel Nye notes that Birney himself reprinted editorials from 23 Northern papers condemning the mob violence and recognizing the danger such violence posed to freedom of speech. Listed were editorials from the Pittsburgh Gazette, the Troy Times, the Columbus, Ohio, Ohio Argus, the Indianapolis, Indiana Palladium, the Sandusky, Ohio, Clarion, the Springfield, Mass., Pioneer, the Pittsburgh Times, the Cleveland Advertiser, the Lynn, Mass., Record, the Dayton, Ohio, Journal and Herald, the Lowell Messenger,

the Columbus, Ohio Atlas, the Carlisle, Pa., Herald and Expositor, the Boston Times, the New York Journal of Commerce, the New York Evening Post, the Greensburgh, Iowa, Repository, the Cincinnati Western Christian Advocate, The Western Banner, and the Pennsylvania Sentinel. Fettered Freedom, p. 136.

44. Russell Nye, Fettered Freedom, pp.114-115.

45. Janet and William Pease, They Who Would Be Free: Blacks' Search for Freedom, 1830-1861, p. 147.

46. Janet and William Pease, They Who Would Be Free: Blacks' Search for Freedom, 1830-1861, p. 20.

47. Aileen Kraditor, Means and Ends in American Abolitisionism, p. 5.

48. Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western University, 1969) p. 349.

49. Ames, A History of the National Intelligencer, p. 342.

50. Baldasty, "Executive Patronage and the Press, 1831-1841," p. 9.

51. Robert V. Remini, Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Democracy, 1833-1845 (New York: Harper & Row, 1984) p. 271.

52. It is obvious that this particular editorial was passed around and used by several different papers. Unfortunately, there is no way to prove who actually wrote it.

53. The Independent Chronicle and Boston Patriot, November 22, 1837.

54. Concerning the riots against Birney, Russel Nye says "Cincinnati editors generally condoned the whole thing. The Republican of August 1, thought it 'the most systematic, orderly, and wellbehaved mob we have ever witnessed,' and the Whig of August 2 said that 'few seem to be dissatisfied with the result, or (have) the slightest sympathy with the sufferers." Fettered Freedom, p. 135.

55. The Georgia Messenger, November 30, 1837.

56. The Encyclopedia of Southern History, p. 684.

57. Several issues of the Maryland Gazette for the month of August were missing from the available collection of newspapers.

58. Clement Eaton, The Freedom of Thought Struggle in the Old South (New York: Harper & Row, 1964) p. 191.

59. Ibid., p. 192.

60. Robert Remini, Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Democracy p. 273.

61. Graham Murdock, "Political deviance: the press presentation of a militant mass demonstration," in The manufacture of news. Deviance, social problems and the mass media, ed. by Jock Young and Stanley Cohen (London: Redwood Burn Limited, 1973) pp. 156-175.

62. Richard Kielbowicz, "Newsgathering by Printers' Exchanges Before the Telegraph," Journalism History 9:2 (Summer 1982): 42-47.